Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Creating and Contributing to Scholarly Conversations across a Range of Genres

---

Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather

ELON UNIVERSITY | CENTER FOR Engaged Learning

Elon University Center for Engaged Learning
Elon, North Carolina
www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org

©2020 by Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license.

This publication extends "Writing Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Articles for Peer-Reviewed Journals" by Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather (2019), originally published in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* (*TLI*), the official journal of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL). Articles published in *TLI* are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license. The original article is available at https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.7.2.3.

"Writing a draft paper" (Reflection 24.1) was originally published as a blog post and is reproduced by permission of the author, Pat Thomson.

"What makes a good critical friend?" (Reflection 26.1) was originally published as a blog post and is reproduced by permission of the author, Rebecca J. Hogue.

Series editors: Jessie L. Moore and Peter Felten
Copyeditor and designer: Jennie Goforth

Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Healey, Mick | Matthews, Kelly E. | Cook-Sather, Alison
Title: Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education / Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather
Description: Elon, North Carolina : Elon University Center for Engaged Learning, [2020] | Series: Center for engaged learning open access book series | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020941985 | ISBN (PDF) 978-1-951414-04-7 | ISBN (PBK) 978-1-951414-05-4 | DOI https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa3
Subjects: LCSH: Academic writing handbooks, manuals, etc.; Education, Higher Research; College teaching; College teachers as authors

CHAPTER 29

PROMOTING YOUR PUBLISHED WORK AND DEVELOPING A PUBLICATION PLAN

> *We have been astonished by the wide number of learning and teaching "wheels" that are reinvented on an annual basis due to lack of dissemination. (Cleaver, Lintern, and McLinden 2018, 98)*

Once your work is published, you need to share it so others can read it, learn from it, and include it in scholarly conversations, and in so doing help avoid some of the reinventing of wheels that Elizabeth Cleaver and colleagues mention above, which are too common in the learning and teaching field. However, your work can easily go unnoticed given the explosion of higher education publications in the past decades (Tight 2018b). There is a reason "publish or perish" has been joined by the cliché "achieve visibility or vanish." A third of social science articles included in Web of Science are not cited within five years of publication (Larivière, Gingras, and Archambault 2009). Melissa Terras (2012) found that when some of her papers were tweeted and blogged, these publications "had at least more than eleven times the number of downloads than their sibling paper which was left to its own devices in the institutional repository." More systematic research, however, indicates little relationship between social media interventions and readership (Davis 2019), though increasing awareness of your work may have other benefits, such as invitations to speak or contribute to related projects (Green 2019). In this chapter we share strategies for collegial promotion of your work, including developing publication plans to generate a coherent body of work.

Promoting Your Published Work

Self-promotion does not come easily to most of us, as we discuss in Our Perspectives 29.1. However, there are over three million journal articles published every year, and this number is increasing annually (Johnson, Wilkinson, and Mabe 2018)—a trend also evident in the broad field of higher education (Tight 2018b). If you want your paper to be noticed, you need to help it along, and this can be done without appearing to boast (see also chapter 22).

Our Perspectives 29.1

How do you feel about promoting your own work?

Alison: I try to think of promoting my work as offering what I have learned in order to support others' efforts and showing how both my own work and theirs are part of an ongoing conversation. So actually I think of it less as promoting and more as connecting—showing continuity of ongoing explorations, inviting new directions that build on those and also that take off from them. I have found such self-promotion/connecting most important when moving from one area of scholarship and practice to another, as I did in shifting from education to SoTL, when I realized that colleagues in the latter arena had little or no familiarity with the work I had done in the former arena.

Mick: Self-promotion goes against the grain. However, particularly since I became an independent consultant, I have realized some is necessary. I try to keep our website up to date and provide links to it from my email signature and handouts I use in workshops. Rather than promote individual publications or workshops, I encourage people to visit the website by providing resources (handouts and bibliographies), most of which are regularly updated, and hope visitors may look at other pages, such as the list of recent publications, while they are there, and, of course, the photos of our dogs!

Kelly: I have a contradictory range of emotions about promoting my own work. I want to share a sense of achievement and

contribution, yet the "look at me" part of it feels like shameless self-promotion and makes me want to hide away. I have a love-hate relationship with social media when it comes to promoting my own work. My university now includes Twitter metrics in our researcher dashboards, so I live in a vexing state of discomfort with my role in the metrics/look-at-me game. My current strategy is to log into Twitter at designated times 2–3 times a week to share new publications from myself or others and interact with people who have interacted with me.

Your perspective: How do you feel about promoting your own work?

Making your writing easy to find starts well before you submit it for publication. Choosing a suitable title (see chapter 9), writing an informative abstract (see chapter 10), and selecting appropriate keywords (see chapter 27) are critical in making your work visible, if those are required for the genre you select. Raising awareness of your work also occurs prior to writing when you make presentations about what you are working on at conferences (see chapter 17).

Once your writing is published, you should also be active in ensuring potentially interested readers are made aware of its existence. Most higher education conferences will allow you to present recently published work. Nearly all the major publishers provide useful advice on promoting your work (e.g., Elsevier 2019). Several strategies are appropriate at this stage. These include:

1. **Make your research open.** Add a pre-print copy of journal publications to academic databases, such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu, as well as your own institutional repository. Ensure that you include a link to the final published version by including its DOI (Digital Object Identifier). If your paper is published in an open access (OA) journal, then a direct link to the published version is easy to include. OA papers are not only downloaded more than non-OA papers, they are also cited more (Hitchcock 2011; Piwowar et al. 2018).

2. **Create a Google Scholar profile.** If you have not already done so, register for a Google Scholar account. It creates a profile of your publications and the number of citations each has received, though you should check the profile for accuracy, particularly if you have the same name as other academics. You can set your account to email you automatically when a new citation is found. It is a great way to keep up with new literature that cites your work (always a nice email to receive), and to see what else authors in your field have written (Konkiel 2014).
3. **Ensure your web pages are up to date.** Check that your latest publications are listed on your institutional web pages and, if you have one, your own website.
4. **Provide a link from your email signature and profiles.** Adding a link to your most recent publications in your email signature is an obvious way of increasing awareness of your work.
5. **Create a video abstract.** Most large commercial journal publishers, such as Taylor & Francis, are beginning to encourage authors of journal articles to produce short video abstracts to promote their articles. They are "easy to share via social media, include in an email, or link to from a web page, [and] they can be a quick and easy way to tell others your research story" (Taylor & Francis "Video Abstracts").
6. **Post on social media.** Make links to your work via any social media accounts you have, such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. For Facebook, consider opening a "professional" account, separate from your social account, to which you invite fellow researchers. Encourage a colleague or the editor to tweet a link to your publication. You could also focus your Twitter promotion around conferences that are relevant to your research topic, by using the event's hashtag and clarifying how your work may be of interest. Your postings may be better received if you include information about interesting publications other than just your own; this may also help you

attract more followers. Melissa Terras (2012), as we noted in chapter 21, suggests that the best time to tweet in the UK is between 11am and 5pm GMT, Monday to Thursday of a working week, though this may differ depending where in the world your target audience is based.

7. **Contribute to a multi-author blog or start your own.** "If you've devoted months to writing the paper, dealing with comments, doing rewrites and hacking through the publishing process, why would you not spend the extra couple of hours crafting an accessible blogpost?" (Dunleavy 2016). There are plenty of multi-author blogs available, or you may wish to consider starting your own blog and regularly post about your ideas (Crick and Winfield 2013; Thesis Whisperer 2018; see also chapter 21).
8. **Register for an ORCID iD.** Ensure that you have registered for ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor Identifier). It provides you with a unique identifier and gives a record of your scholarly work.
9. **Send publications to scholars you have cited.** Consider sending a copy of your publication to scholars you cite while also thanking them for their contributions to the scholarly community (Sutherland, personal communication, August 18, 2019). Some may already be aware of your work through citation notifications they receive from Google Scholar or ResearchGate.

Making a Publication Plan

At many universities, we are increasingly being encouraged to plan our activities more systematically so that we can manage our time and meet institutional targets. This is a common topic covered in doctoral programs, and many universities require that their research-active staff and faculty produce publication plans for their research (e.g., University of Manchester 2018; Sheffield Hallam University 2016).

A sample writing plan is given in Table 29.1. When creating your publication plan, it is important to be as specific as you can in terms of

Table 29.1: A sample three-year writing-for-publication plan

Genre	Outlet	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Empirical research article on . . . for . . .	Journal	■	■	■	■								
Research paper presentation on . . . at . . .	Conference		■										
Teaching award	Application			■									
Case study on . . . for . . .	Chapter				■	■	■						
Presentations on . . . at . . .	Workshop					■							
Opinion piece on . . . for . . .	Blog							■					
Poster presentation on . . . at . . .	Conference							■					
Empirical research article on . . . for . . .	Journal							■	■	■	■		
Edit a collection of articles	Book								■	■	■	■	■
Conceptual article on . . . for . . .	Report										■	■	■
Promotion	Application											■	■

what topics you'll write about, where each item may be published (including whether the outlet will be generic or discipline-based), and whether the publications will be sole- or co-authored. You are likely to be less specific the longer in advance you are planning, in part because your writing plans will depend on the progress of your research and on your success in obtaining funding. Most of the outputs should normally, at least in the short run, cover a limited number of related topics, so that your body of work is making a significant contribution to a broad research area and you are not seen as jumping around among too many different subjects. You will also need to build in some flexibility to allow time to respond positively to interesting requests to, for example, co-author an article or essay, write a book chapter, or present a keynote. Similarly, you may be active in promoting a co-authored publication with a colleague or someone you meet at a conference or on social media. Hence you will probably need to update the plan every quarter or so. A blank version of the "Sample Three-Year Writing-for-Publication Plan" is available in the online resources.

However, it is important to remember that what is reasonable for you to achieve is dependent on your motivations, stage of career, kind of institution, and other contextual factors that affect the opportunities available to you. Planning for two or three outputs over a three-year period may be just as appropriate as planning for fifteen to twenty outputs. You may also consider keeping a publication diary that helps you keep track of key deadlines or target dates for different stages in the writing and publication process for the multiple, overlapping projects you may have on the go (Salter 2016). As we noted in chapter 23, writing in some genres, such as preparing a blog post or an opinion piece, takes considerably less time than writing an empirical research article or a book.

The plan in Table 29.1 is one approach, and we freely admit that none of us maintains a plan like this (although we know people who do!). Indeed, Kelly's reaction on seeing this plan was:

> I have never in my life used a publication plan like the one we show—it would stress me out! For me, the

> weight of all that work would shut me down. I almost need to agree to a writing project with a sense of un-estimating the work or I would never agree to any!

The important point is to maintain a running record, backwards and forwards, of your writing accomplishments and ventures. Each of us has a less formalized list of commitments, which we regularly update and reprioritize as new opportunities arise. Kelly uses a template for planning group projects, which helps to clarify each participant's planned contribution from start to finish of the project (see "Simple Publication Plan for Getting Started" and "Project Plan for Research" in the online resources). In planning you should recognize the overlapping nature of writing timelines. For example, writing an 800-word blog post within two weeks may overlap with a two-month deadline for revisions requested from a journal article submitted six months prior as well as the need to return proofs of another article that had been accepted for publication several months ago within three days. In short, writing requires juggling differing yet overlapping time frames.

You will notice that examples of many of the genres we discuss in this book are included in our sample plan. Few people would write in all these genres in a three-year period. We would encourage you, however, as we have argued in several places in this book, to consider writing in a wide range of genres over your career, because many of the genres will address different audiences and engage you in varied, though related, conversations.

There are, of course, many reasons why we write, and these reasons may be extrinsic as well as intrinsic (see chapter 6). Pat Thomson (2014), who is a highly prolific author, breaks down her writing tasks into:

- stuff she has to write (e.g., reporting on research projects);
- stuff she gets asked to write (such as book chapters);
- stuff related to supervision (writing with her students); and
- stuff she wants to write (projects that interest her).

She has several of these kinds of "stuff" going on at the same time. Notably, she leaves out writing her weekly blog (*Patter*), describing it as "part of everyday activity, a bit like brushing your teeth."

For many people, ourselves included, much writing is responsive to openings as they appear, whether these are a result of chance conversations, ideas that have arisen from our reading, or invitations. Furthermore, we have each experienced different forms of continuity in topic areas in the short and the long run, and we have all experienced shifting our interests in relation to external stimuli as well as internal commitments.

Kelly, for example, experienced a shift from discipline-based to more general higher education publication outlets that started from a locally based project informing institutional curriculum development. Her early research in learning and teaching explored how science students experienced learning in their undergraduate programs. Naturally, her inquiry was in a specific disciplinary (life sciences), institutional (large, comprehensive research-intensive university), and geographical context (Australia). She employed methods that privileged numeric data gathered via surveys to capture large numbers of students, because using quantitative data is common in the sciences. Yet her research spoke to different conversations that were unfolding in the science higher education community and more broadly. While it might appear daunting if you are new to writing, Kelly's cascading "plan" over a seven-year period signals how writing can contribute to different scholarly communities and be translated across social media and traditional research outlets (and involve students as co-authors):

1. **Starting with a national and discipline-specific contribution:** Kelly's conference talk at a national, discipline-based conference became a publication (in the *International Journal for Science and Mathematics Education*) on capturing science students' perceptions of learning outcomes (Matthews and Hodgson 2012).
2. **Joining a discipline-specific, international conversation**: An article for the *International Journal of Science Education* explored science students' perceptions of learning outcomes

with broader implications for undergraduate science curriculum development (Varsavsky, Matthews, and Hodgson 2014).

3. **Informing local curriculum development:** An institutional report for a seven-year curriculum review cycle of the Bachelor of Science degree program focused on students' perceptions of their learning gains and outcomes to guide ongoing curriculum planning (Faculty of Science 2015).
4. **Connecting to a broader higher education conversation:** A publication for *Studies in Higher Educatio*n contributed to a broader, cross-disciplinary conversation in higher education about student and lecturer perceptions of learning outcomes linked to ongoing debates about "graduate attributes" (Matthews and Mercer-Mapstone 2018).
5. **Linking to a higher education, topic-specific conversation:** An article on comparative assessment of student learning outcomes was published in *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* (Dvorakova and Matthews 2017).
6. **Reaching new audiences through different genres**: Kelly contributed focused pieces through blog posts for a national science teaching centre (Australian Council of Deans of Science New Ideas in TL), professional society newsletter contributions (*Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia News*), and an article in *The Conversation* (Matthews 2018).

This example shows how engaging in writing about learning and teaching is a journey through conversations over many years with different scholarly communities (see chapter 8) that span local, national, and international knowledges (see chapter 1). We would readily admit, however, that looking back, our writing appears more strategic and ordered than it was at the time, when things appeared messier and more responsive. Nevertheless, preparing writing plans can be valuable in managing time and mapping out a strategic direction, as long as they are flexible and allow for the uncertainties and opportunities, disappointments and delights that arise in a learning and teaching scholar's academic life.

Over to You

Although they do not necessarily come naturally, promoting your publications and developing a writing plan for publication are important skills to acquire and cultivate, if you are going to be a productive writer who has an impact on scholarly conversation about learning and teaching in higher education. As with everything we recommend in this book, we suggest that you need to develop versions of these strategies that work for you and that are consistent with the writing self you want to be. Thinking about your answers to these questions might help:

- Which of the suggested ways of promoting your published work do you use? Which could you see yourself using?
- Do you keep a writing-for-publication plan that you regularly update? If not, you might try completing the "Sample Three-Year Writing-for-Publication Plan" available in the online resources (but do not feel guilty if this is not your thing).
- What kind of publication plan might you develop to reach varied audiences through a range of genres?